

Education & Workforce Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM | JULY 13, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET,
SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 11:01 AM on July 13, 2023, Tessa LeSage, Branch Facilitator, convened the Education & Workforce Branch meeting. The following members were present:

- T. Sharon Woodberry
- Dr. Guido Minaya
- Phyllis Calloway
- Laura Siebenmorgen
- Dr. Amir Neto (on behalf of Dr. Aysegul Timur)

Facilitator and Branch Support:

- Tessa LeSage, Collaboratory
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting
- Shanna Snider, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Tessa LeSage, Branch Facilitator, provided a review of the work of the Recovery Task Force (RTF) and its Branches. Ms. LeSage reviewed the timeline for the RTF, indicating the project is nearly halfway complete and emphasizing the transition to Phase Two of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (the Plan) which includes identification and confirmation of Initiatives to align with Branch-specific Priorities.

Branch Initiatives Discussion

Members discussed the Initiatives as they align with the priorities and identified gaps. Ms. Woodberry stated that the Initiatives align well. Members discussed the need to support small businesses (25 employees or less) with additional resources.

Ms. Calloway suggested that the Lee County School District could support childhood programs in early pre-k education. She stated that early childhood educational programs would benefit the workforce and be more conducive to the resilience of the education system. Dr. Minaya highlighted the need for skilled staff for daycare programs. Members discussed separating the Initiative based on funding for quality early childhood education programs. They agreed to keep daycare separate as it can be a barrier to workers experiencing issues accessing childcare.

Dr. Neto suggested adult learning be included in an Initiative. Dr. Minaya suggested that businesses could provide resources for those trying to increase training. To encourage lifelong learning, Members discussed the need for an Initiative that covers adult learning and training. Dr. Minaya suggested a program that attracts, creates interest, and matches skillsets for individuals. Ms. LeSage described the work of FutureMakers Coalition as it works to remove barriers for adult learners to get the skills and resources they need.

Dr. Neto suggested that the Initiative regarding literacy should explicitly state “youth and adult students in the region”. Dr. Minaya suggested providing programs that create greater awareness of available training programs aligned with local jobs. Members acknowledged a lack of programs that allow lifelong learning and support job growth and development.

Dr. Minaya remarked that employees that have left the workforce prior to retirement should be addressed and proposed created programs to extend the workforce. Members identified end-of-career training as a gap. Ms. Woodberry stated that there is a change in the culture of utilizing skills outside of traditional pathways. She suggested connecting people to resources as part of the solution to connect lifelong learners to non-traditional pathways.

Dr. Neto stated the need for mental health crisis training and Members further discussed the overlap with the Health & Social Services Branch addressing the mental health needs of the workforce.

Dr. Minaya described the ecosystem of large companies that support the pipeline of skillset training to the workforce. Dr. Minaya suggested a project to identify the gaps in the workforce pipeline ecosystem. Ms. LeSage stated that Florida Gulf Coast University and FutureMakers Coalition are creating models for this in certain sectors and are working to build them out.

Ms. LeSage suggested increasing awareness and opportunities to explore skills in careers that are available K-5 for career exposure. This, along with programs to increase career readiness, was aligned with the second Priority.

Branch Technical Briefs

Ms. LeSage explained the development of Technical Briefs, Branch Action Plans, and Initiatives in the development of the Plan.

Members explored the idea of a Technical Brief regarding career exploration programs through the State Department of Education. Additional Technical Briefs suggested were best practices for daycare and early childhood education, and policies around the two. Ms. LeSage explained that daycare is usually in individualized programs and provided an example of Hendry County increasing the number of opportunities and the quality of education.

Members agreed that it would be part of the implementation steps to increase programs of early childhood education and daycare.

Questions and Next Steps

The next Branch meeting is scheduled for August 10, 2023, from 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM.

Ms. Calloway suggested additional information be provided to the Branch in place of a meeting next week.

Public Comment

Betsy Hasemeyer discussed the need for translators for different cultures within the region to address the varying language skills and technical aspects of jobs. She also suggested youth wellness groups and other urban strategies for communities of color and vulnerable communities.

Mike Love requested that the public and organizations have access to material ahead of time. He stated that receiving the material prior to Branch Meetings will allow organizations to better prepare.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked the members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 12:23 PM.